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On

New Historicism in the Select Novels of Nayantara Sahgal

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I was searching for how history matters in the literature. At that time of choosing the topic, I have read many writers and their works. Nayantara Sahgal is one of them. Her focus on Indian political, social and historical scenario before and after independence appealed me the most to select her fictional world for my research.

I like History, because it helps to understand past. Literature and history are closely interrelated. No literature exists in vacuum. It is influenced by history and it is also influenced by the present. We must study the past to better prepare for the future and understand the present. The purpose of the study is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by resituating it. In other words, history here is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and evaluation of preconceived notions.

It is interesting to work on Nayantara Sahgal from New Historicism point of view, but at the same time it is also very challenging and demanding task. New Historicism, a new theory, was coined and developed by the American critic and Harvard English professor Stephen Greenblatt, especially in the study of English Renaissance texts. Stephen Greenblatt's work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) is usually regarded as its beginning.

New Historicism defined as a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. New

Historicism is based on the assumption that a literary work is the product of the time, place and circumstances of its composition. It is a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform and interrogate each other.

In traditional approach; history, society and literature serve as a context for understanding literary texts but in New Historicism, historical documents of the same period are taken as co-text of the same historical moment that is embedded in literary text. Thus the historicist approach to text is nothing but an evaluation of a segment of historical reality as projected by the novelist whose techniques of writing fiction enable him or her to describe his or her world vision.

New Historicism is influenced by postmodernist idea of Derrida and Foucault. Both deconstruct a text to construct the meaning of a text. Stephen Greenblatt, Michel Foucault, Alan Liu, Catherine Gallagher, Louis A. Montrose, and Clifford Geertz, Catherine Gallagher, Hayden White, Jonathan Dollimore are the key figure of New Historicism.

New Historicism is a form of literary theory whose goal is to understand work through its historical context and to understand as well as to investigate the political, cultural, social and intellectual history through literature. It is also true to say that the writers themselves are products of historical happenings. Literary works are as much as product of the authors mind set as well as the conditions that surrounded it. This group of scholars donot take history and historical background just as a political events of period. Rather, they attempt to locate text within discourses are widespread at the time. In course of application of the concept to literary text, the new

historicist frequently use certain terms, such as power, circulation, hegemony, containment, history, textuality, context, ideology, discourse.

Clifford Greetz's essay *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973), *The Powers of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982) by Stephen Greenblatt and Gerome McGann *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism* (1985) these are the seminal text of New Historicism.

In India, Historians subaltern studies have been employing the methodological insights of the New Historicist. Indian English literature in general and Nayantara Sahgal's novels in particular provide sufficient score for new historical approach and analysis. Nayantara Sahgal, in her novels *A Time to Be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadows* (1972), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Plans for Departure* (1986) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) effectively represented prevailing practices in society. She is one of those prominent literary figures who have made mark in Indian English writing. She is exclusively regarded as a political writer. She deals with various phases of political movements in her novels.

Nayantara Sahgal was born in Allahabad on 10 May 1927. She is one of the Indian novelists and journalists. Sahgal was educated in the United States at Wellesley College. Sahgal belongs to family of freedom fighters which had politics in its very blood. All her childhood was spent in Anand Bhavan at Allahabad with her parents, maternal uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru, and her cousin Indira Gandhi. She grew up during national movement. Nayantara Sahgal is prolific writer. She has to credit nine novels, two biographies, two political commentaries and large number of articles contributions to various

newspapers and magazines. She is a writer with the national consciousness. Mrs. Nayantara Sahgal is one of the most outstanding feminist Indian novelists writing in English. Besides the political background which is a very well projected, there is a human background also.

She was awarded the 1986 Sahitya Academi Award for English, for her novel, *Rich Like Us* (1985). This book also won Sinclair Fiction Prize. Her book *Plan for Departure* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize. She was awarded and Honorary Doctorate for literature by University of Leeds. The aim of proposed study is exploring history, society and politics reflected in Nayantara Sahgal's selected novels with fresh perspective of contemporary time period.

Nature of the Problem

How literary text relate to their historical background?

What were some major controversies at the time the book was written?

How is history, politics and society portrayed in the select fiction?

Statement of Problem

This study endeavours to analyse the historical socio-political milieu in India a reflected in the selected novels. Impact of historical movements on the masses reveal in the selected novels of Nayantara Sahgal.

Review of literature

Several research works has been done in the field of thematic concern in English novels. Very few students have studied Nayantara Sahgal through

their different research topics such as, “The Feminist Approach and the Fictional World of Nayantara Sahgal: A Critical Study” by Dr.Jaydipsinh K. Dodiya and “Postcolonial Dialectic in The Novels of Nayantara Sahgal” by P.P Ajaykumar. However, Nayantara Sahgal remained much unexplored from the point of New Historicism. As this aspect of investigation is not touched upon by any researcher, it can be discussed thoroughly in proposed study.

Objectives

To study the modern fictional history of India represented by Nayantara Sahgal in the selected novels.

To reveal the politics of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and contemporary political personalities projected by Nayantara Sahgal.

To focus on the social, political and historical context reflected in Nayantara Sahgal’s selected novels.

To highlight the power-hungry politicians represented by Nayantara Sahgal in the selected novels.

To project a nation’s consciousness through the fragmentary consciousness of an individual.

Hypothesis

The selected novels of Nayantara Sahgal reveal the pre-Independence and post-Independence history, politics and society of India. The present research highlights the power-hungry politicians and their power ambition. It focuses on the ardent freedom fighters and their sacrifices through

Nayantara Sahgal's selected novels. She emphasizes on historical movements like Non-Cooperation Movement, Khilafat Movement, Dandi March, Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement. Her novels deal with professional elections and the role of money in election and corruption in politics. Emergency period bring chaos in the political scene. It was controversial period of the political history of independent India.

Scope and Limitations

The primary sources will the original texts and Literary Journals, periodicals, magazines. Primary sources will be novels of Nayantara Sahgal: *A Time to Be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadows* (1972), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Plans for Departure* (1986) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) these novels will be interpreted in the light of New Historicism. Secondary sources will be Bipin Chandra's books: *History of Modern India* and *India After Independence.*

Research Methodology

The Research methodology will be evaluative, interpretative, descriptive, comparative, critical and analytical. The selected texts will be analyzed through the perspective of New Historicism. The MLA Handbook of Research, 7th edition will be used for citations. This method can be taken for the deliberation and references.

Tentative Chapterization

For the purpose of convenience the present study will be divided into five chapters as a detailed hearing:

Chapter I : Introduction

Chapter II : New Historicism in *A Time to Be Happy, This Time of Morning, Storm in Chandigarh* and *The Day in Shadow*

Chapter III : New Historicism in *A Situation in New Delhi* and *Rich Like Us*

Chapter IV : New Historicism in *Plans for Departure and Mistaken Identity*

Chapter V : Summing Up

Significance of the Study

The perspective of New Historicism would help to examine the novels of Nayantara Sahgal. The significance of the study is examining the voice of the writer and her experiential influence on the text. The study will definitely go a long way in understanding the role of politics in shaping the society. The study would be helpful to create awareness to reconstruct the relationship between history and humanity at large.

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